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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Iranian Elite Research Center, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 February 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Status of Minority Rights and Freedom in Iran

For more than four thousand years, Assyrian and Armenian tribes, known as Jews and Christians and also Zoroastrians, the greatest non-Muslim Iranian group, have been living peacefully in Iran alongside their Muslim compatriots. With a look at the pre-revolution history of Iran, one can understand that some problems did exist regarding the identification of minorities. In the old constitution, the religious minorities in Iran were named as Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, were as in the post-revolution version they were corrected to Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian.

Iran is a country with religious beliefs. Therefore, Iranians pay a certain respect for the country's official religious minority groups. According to the constitution, all Iranians, regardless of their religion and race, have equal citizenship rights. Plus, followers of monotheist religions are free to practice their personal lives according to their religion's standards. Official religious minorities in Iran have fundamental rights and freedoms which are considered in the post-revolution constitution. Amongst which is their right to religious teaching, learning the language of their minority and recognizing their religious masters.

Article 64 of the constitution considers two representatives of the parliament for Armenian Christians, and one each for Assyrian Christians, Chaldeans, Zoroastrians and Jews. If the populations of these minorities drop for reasons such as migration, these five seats are still to remain in place.

In the past years, the courts were obliged to comply with all rules related to inheritance, wills, marriage and divorce of the minorities according to the laws of religious minorities themselves. Religious minorities own places such as the Ararat Club and Tehran Assyrian Association, and are also receptive f the Nowruz ceremony and bazaars alongside Muslims and non-Muslims without limitations. Also, all minorities have religious monuments and holy places which in some cases are restored and renovated through governmental expenses.

In total, more than 300 churches , 70 historic synagogues, 50 active synagogues and 20 Zoroastrian fire temples exist in Iran; some of which a have a historical significance and have been registered in UNESCO's historical monuments. Around 40 churches have been repaired and renovated with the expense and help of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization. Also around 27 churches and holy shrines belonging to religious minorities in the country has been registered as the country's historical monuments and national heritage list. Iran has 10 places for slaughtering meat according to Jewish customs, 4 restaurants and more than 20 NGO's and cultural organizations dedicated to Jewish minorities.

Today non-Muslim Iranians are free to engage in religious, social and political activities. Many registered organizations and associations who are legally active, are in charge of the religious and social affairs of non-Muslim Iranians. The board members of these organizations and associations are elected through the direct vote of the religious minority group and their work permits are issued and extended each year according to the newly elected members.

Iranian Christians are free to hold their religious ceremonies such as Easter, Christmas and the New Year. Since Fridays are a national holiday in Iran and not Sundays, Some churches hold their Sunday mass on Fridays so that those who go to work throughout the week can attend. Fellow Zoroastrian and Jewish Iranians too hold ceremonies such as Passover, Jewish New year, Century, Mehregan, Farvardingan and etc.

The number of Jewish women who go to university increased post-revolution. Today more than 70 percent of women of religious minorities have studied at university. More than 90 percent of Jewish organizations in Iran are students or have graduated. At least 4 Jewish people are working as a university professor or assistant professor.

The Christian Olympic Sports Games is held twice a year in Tehran and Urumia, which is funded partially by the government. The children of Iranian religious minorities participate in the same university entrance exam as others and are graded the same way; above all, they are tested according to their own minority's religious teachings.

Non-Muslim Doctors, lawyers, engineers are at work in Iran without any limitations in Muslim clients referring to them. The Iranian society seeks to resolve the problems of non-Muslims. It is clear in the new article which was added to the constitution in 2003 by the Iranian Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, which stresses that the restitution for Muslims and non-Muslims official religious minorities should be the same.

Statistical analysis of the social and economic participation of religious minorities, particularly in the past four years after the Islamic Revolution shows some improvement. In the past four years, there has been some progress in the laws of religious minorities in several areas:

Legislative areas:

- In 1391, a law was passed in the Parliament whereby the split and consumption of water, electricity and gas of religious temples and buildings of religious minorities were free .

Administrative areas:

- In 1389 missionary, the Tehran Municipality dedicated a sum of 2 billion and 2 hundred Tomans to build an assembly hall for the Assyrians. The Construction of the hall was under the supervision of Tehran Municipality and the Assyrians.
- In 1390, a budget of one million dollars was dedicated to the charitable hospital of Doctor Sepir (A Jewish Charity). This particular hospital focused on care before and after delivery for low-income families. Today the hospital is active in preventing different types of cancer with the help of the Iranian government and it's ministry of health. The hospital receives patient in need from regardless their religion. 90 percent of their patients are in fact non-Jews.
- In the annual governmental budget of 1391, one billion Tomans was dedicated to the religious minority groups.
- In 1391, the Ministry of Sports and Youth dedicated 100 million Tomans to the Assyrians Sport Festivals.
- In 1392, Tehran Municipality dedicated 130 million Tomans for the construction of the park devoted to religious minorities.
- In 1392, the Parliament allocated 5 billion Tomans to the cultural activity budget of religious minorities. That is an increase of $ 1 billion from the previous year.
- In 1392, the presidential office added a new deputy position for a department called "Department of Religious and ethnic minorities". The deputy of this department and its consultants are of religious minorities and they engage to resolve the affairs of religious minorities.
- During the years of 1388,1389 and 1390, 38 million Tomans was allocated to religious minority NGO's from the presidency's center of *Women and Family Affairs.*

Jurisdiction :

- In 1391, based on Article 297 of the Islamic Penal Code, an amended was made that stated that restitution for Muslims and non –Muslims are to be equal.
- In 1392, a Judiciary Act led to the supervision of the orphan children of religious minorities under non-Muslim care.

According to Article 7 of the civil law, in matters of personal affairs, religious minorities are to abide with their own religious laws. However the Judiciary Council established a Dispute Resolution Council dedicated for each minority group under their own management.